

SCOPING REPORT
for the
MANAGEMENT PLAN
and
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
for
CRATERS OF THE MOON NATIONAL MONUMENT AND PRESERVE

September 2002

INTRODUCTION

Overview

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Upper Snake River District (USRD) and the National Park Service (NPS), Craters of the Moon National Monument (CRMO), propose to use a combined Resource Management Plan (RMP)/General Management Plan (GMP) to replace portions of four existing BLM Land Use plans and one NPS General Management Plan. This single, interagency RMP/GMP will establish management direction for the entire Craters of the Moon National Monument. The proposed, new land use plan will be a stand alone, comprehensive plan for the recently expanded Monument.

Presidential Proclamation 1694 established the Craters of the Moon National Monument on May 2, 1924, for the purpose of protecting the unusual landscape of the Craters of the Moon lava field. Presidential Proclamation 7373 of November 9, 2000, further expanded the size of the Monument and mandated cooperative management of the Monument by the Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service (Agencies). Passage of bill HR601 on August 21, 2002, designated the NPS portion of the expanded Monument as a National Preserve. This law authorizes hunting within the Preserve and recognizes the Preserve as a unit of the National Park Service. Henceforth in this document when the *Monument* is referenced, the National Preserve is included unless otherwise stated.

Purpose and Need

National Monuments may be designated by Presidential Proclamation to conserve, protect, enhance, and manage public land areas for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. The Craters of the Moon National Monument contains volcanic and lava features, lava tubes, ice caves, and kipukas (vegetated islands surrounded by lava) whose density, relative youth, and scientific and public interest are unique in the contiguous United States.

The Plan will provide the Agencies with a comprehensive framework for managing public lands within the Monument over the next 20 years. The Plan, when approved, will replace the land use planning decisions in the existing land use plans for this area. Decisions in existing plans that still have merit will be carried forward and incorporated into this planning effort.

The authorizing Proclamations and management principles contained in FLPMA and the NPS Organic Act will guide the land use decisions within the planning area. Authorized uses must be determined to be compatible with the purposes identified in the enabling Proclamations. All lands may not be open for all uses. To protect certain resource values, some uses may be excluded on some lands either by law or regulation or by decision reached through the planning process. The Plan will be prepared using the most current and best available information and through collaboration with interested publics and authorized users.

Planning Area Description

The Craters of the Moon National Monument is located in south-central Idaho. The Monument encompasses 739,682 acres of public land, 8,321 acres of State land and 6,860 acres of private land. The decisions made through this planning process will apply only to public land within the Monument boundary. The Monument is located in Blaine, Butte, Lincoln, Minidoka, and Power counties and is within a one-hour drive of Twin Falls and Idaho Falls ([see maps](#)).

The planning area lies within the Snake River Plain. The Snake River Plain was built up by repeated volcanic outpourings. The chief physiographic feature of this section is the remarkably flat lava plains broken only by occasional volcanic cones. The area is bounded on the north by the Idaho Batholith and on the south by the Basin and Range Province. The dominant vegetation is sagebrush with associated grass and forb understory species. Cheat grass is also widespread as a component or dominant member of the plant community.

The Monument was established in 1924 as an area that “contains many curious and unusual phenomena of great educational value and has a weird and scenic landscape peculiar to itself.” The Monument contains the largest basaltic volcanic field of dominantly Holocene age (less than 10,000 years old) in the contiguous United States.

Description of Scoping Process

Scoping is the term used to describe the early and open process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed in the planning process. The Notice of Intent (NOI) to jointly prepare a land use plan and the associated EIS for the Craters of the Moon National Monument was published in the Federal Register on April 24, 2002. The Notice initiated the public scoping process by inviting participation in identifying planning issues and developing planning criteria.

Several Monument tours and briefings were held to update groups on the planning process. These included representatives from Lava Lake Land and Livestock, the Nature Conservancy, The Wilderness Society, Committee for Idaho’s High Desert, the Western Watersheds Project, the Idaho Conservation League, the Alliance for the Wild Rockies, and the Society for Range Management.

Open house public meetings were held in eight communities throughout southern Idaho: Arco, Carey, Shoshone, American Falls, Rupert, Ft. Hall, Hailey, and Boise. The dates and locations

of these meetings were publicized through mailings and news releases as well as posted on websites for the [National Park Service](#) and [Bureau of Land Management](#).

Resource Advisory Council

The Craters of the Moon planning team has been briefing the Upper Snake River Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) on a regular basis. The most recent update was present to the RAC on July 24 and 25. The RAC members have indicated they will form a subgroup to specifically work with the Craters planning effort.

Congressional Contacts

A field hearing was held in Twin Falls, ID, on June 17, 2000, on the proposed expansion of the Craters of the Moon National Monument. At that hearing, chaired by Idaho U.S. Senator Larry Craig, Jim Morris, Superintendent of the Craters of the Moon National Monument, National Park Service gave a prepared statement and responded to questions from hearing officials. Bill Baker, Resource Area Manager for the Shoshone Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management, also answered questions from the hearing panel.

During the past two years since the field hearing, local Congressional staffers have been given updates on the status of the CRMO planning process and timeline at regularly scheduled quarterly briefings. The open houses held in June 2002 were well attended by local Congressional staffers. These offices are updated regularly through personal telephone calls and newsletter mailings.

Cooperating Agencies/Invitees

In July briefings were given to County Commissioners for Butte County, Blaine County and Power County. County Commissioners for Lincoln and Minidoka Counties were also offered a briefing but chose not to receive an update at this time. To date, none of the five counties has expressed a desire to be a cooperating agency. The Mini-Cassia Transportation Committee was briefed by the Craters Planning Team and has indicated they want to continue to be involved in the planning process. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service specialists have been updated on the process. In addition, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game staff members were briefed on the planning process and this state agency has agreed to continue to participate and provide needed information for the Plan.

Collaboration with Tribes

Superintendent Jim Morris, Monument Manager Rick Vander Voet, and several members of the planning team met with the Shoshone-Bannock tribal Land Use Policy Commission on March 19 to explain the process and invite their participation. They were sent resource materials and are being updated through the newsletters and other correspondence with the commission members. One of the public open houses was held June 13 in Fort Hall at the tribal council business offices. Additionally, at a two-day workshop at Fort Hall on July 22-23, members of the CRMO planning team fielded questions about the planning process and schedule.

SCOPING SUMMARY

Press Releases

Local and regional newspapers and radio stations throughout the planning area were used to disseminate information on the Monument Management Plan scoping and planning process. Press releases were prepared and mailed on April 24, 2002 by the BLM announcing the official scoping meetings and inviting the public to provide input. Press releases were provided to the following print and broadcast media:

| Newspapers | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| South Idaho Press – Burley | Times News – Twin Falls |
| Arco Advertiser – Arco | Idaho Statesman - Boise |
| Shelley Pioneer - Shelly | High Country News – Paonia, CO |
| Wood River Journal – Hailey | Idaho Mountain Express – Ketchum |
| Minidoka County News – Rupert | Sho-Ban News – Fort Hall |
| Morning News – Blackfoot | Post Register – Idaho Falls |
| Idaho State Journal – Pocatello | Power County Press – American Falls |
| Television | |
| KTVB Channel 7 – Boise | KPVI Channel 6 – Pocatello |
| KBCI Channel 2 – Boise | KIFI Channel 8 – Idaho Falls |
| KTFT Channel 38 – Twin Falls | KIDK Channel 3 – Idaho Falls |
| KMVT Channel 11 – Twin Falls | KIVI Channel 6 - Meridian |
| KTRV Channel 12 - Nampa | Northwest Cable News – Seattle, WA |
| Radio | |
| KSKI FM | KART AM |
| KECH FM – Ketchum | KMVX FM – Jerome |
| KLIX AM & FM | KBAR/KZDX AM & FM |
| KTFI AM & FM | KFTA AM |
| KEZJ FM – Twin Falls | KKMV FM – Rupert |
| KUPI AM – Idaho Falls | KRIC – Rexburg |
| KID-AM – Idaho Falls | KWIK – Pocatello |

Media coverage of the scoping meetings and planning process has been extensive and positive.

Scoping Meetings

Public scoping meetings were held in Arco on June 4, Carey on June 5, Shoshone on June 6, American Falls on June 11, Rupert on June 12, Fort Hall on June 13, Hailey on June 18 and Boise on June 19. The BLM distributed press releases to local and regional media announcing the time, locations and purpose of these meetings.

The format for the scoping meetings was an “open house” style, featuring informal, one-on-one exchanges with interdisciplinary team members and those attending. Attendees had the option of signing a registration book as they entered the room. Team members then escorted attendees to

stations set up around the room, which detailed resource issues and a proposed schedule for completing the planning process. Stationed GIS inventory maps illustrated monument resources including road class, allotments, Wilderness Study Areas, fire history in the district and proposed fire management zones. Attendees were encouraged to sit and fill out comment cards; most were returned by mail. Copies of the first newsletter were available as were copies of the Great Rift Map & Supplement.

Attendance

Approximately 1500 copies of Newsletter #1 were distributed with an insert identifying the open house schedule and locations. These were handed out at the Monument Visitor Center and at local post offices in the communities of Arco, Carey, Shoshone, American Falls, and Rupert. Copies were also mailed out to over 300 individuals and organizations identified jointly by BLM and NPS staff. The following table summarizes the number of attendees at the open houses (not all attendees registered)

| Attendance | |
|--------------------------|-----|
| Arco – 6/04/02 | 25 |
| Carey – 6/05/02 | 15 |
| Shoshone – 6/06/02 | 16 |
| American Falls – 6/11/02 | 18 |
| Rupert – 6/27/02 | 27 |
| Fort Hall – 6/13/02 | 31 |
| Hailey – 6/18/02 | 22 |
| Boise – 6/19/02 | 12 |
| TOTAL | 166 |

Comments

Responses – called *letters* for the purpose of this document – were received through all venues and in a variety of formats. Written letters were received from the attendees at the scoping meetings and by surface mail and email at the BLM Shoshone Field Office. A total of 169 letters were received. These came from a number of states, as indicated in the following table:

| State | Number of Letters |
|---------------|-------------------|
| Alabama | 1 |
| Arizona | 1 |
| California | 11 |
| Colorado | 4 |
| Florida | 7 |
| Georgia | 4 |
| Idaho | 75 |
| Illinois | 8 |
| Kansas | 1 |
| Louisiana | 2 |
| Massachusetts | 3 |

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Maryland | 1 |
| Michigan | 3 |
| Minnesota | 1 |
| Missouri | 2 |
| New Jersey | 5 |
| New Hampshire | 2 |
| New York | 6 |
| Ohio | 5 |
| Oregon | 3 |
| Pennsylvania | 3 |
| Rhode Island | 1 |
| Texas | 8 |
| Tennessee | 1 |
| Utah | 4 |
| Vermont | 1 |
| Virginia | 2 |
| Washington | 3 |
| Wisconsin | 6 |

Letters came from the following communities within the state of Idaho:

| Community | Number of Letters |
|------------------|--------------------------|
| Arco | 3 |
| Bellevue | 1 |
| Blackfoot | 1 |
| Boise | 20 |
| Buhl | 1 |
| Burley | 5 |
| Carey | 3 |
| Clayton | 2 |
| Driggs | 1 |
| Fort Hall | 1 |
| Gooding | 2 |
| Hailey | 1 |
| Heyburn | 2 |
| Idaho Falls | 4 |
| Island Park | 1 |
| Jerome | 1 |
| Ketchum | 4 |
| Mackay | 1 |
| Moore | 1 |
| Pocatello | 3 |
| Richfield | 2 |
| Rigby | 1 |
| Riggins | 1 |

| | |
|------------|---|
| Rupert | 5 |
| Shoshone | 1 |
| Twin Falls | 6 |

Letters were divided among federal and state agencies and local government, interest groups and individuals in the following numbers:

| Originator | Number of Letters |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Federal, state and local | 9 |
| Interest groups | 12 |
| Individuals | 148 |

Some comments pertained to more than one analysis topic and were entered more than once. Petition-type comment letters were entered once using the name and address of the person-organization-industry that forwarded the letters. Specifically, 97 form letters were received from members of the National Parks & Conservation Association. There were seven separate issue topics included in these form letters, which were recorded individually by topic.

Comment Distribution by Analysis Topic: 536 total comments

- 1) General (56 comments)
- 2) Development (52 comments)
- 3) Transportation and Access (139 comments)
- 4) Visitor Use and Public Safety (77 comments)
- 5) Authorized Uses (80 comments)
- 6) Natural and Cultural Resources (132 comments)

ISSUE SUMMARY

Summary of Public Comments by Issue or Topic

There were a few new concerns brought to the planning team from this initial scoping process. For example, the public would like definitions provided of BLM road classifications, what provisions will there be for overflights and landings, concern that rock climbing may damage fragile resources, and the need to tie into regional trail systems. Comments received will assist in the development and analysis of alternatives as well as the development of points to address in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The following summary of comments is by analysis topic:

Development: Comments supported minimizing the amount of new visitor amenities and interpretive signs by placing them in nearby gateway communities. It was suggested that the expanded area of Craters should be kept as a primitive area with no road improvement, no restrooms or camping areas as it is felt that any such improvements will ruin what should be protected. Other comments asked for trailside guide signs, maps and information, improved

roads and trails, access to new camping locations, toilets, water and communications without removing any existing facilities. Some wanted interpretive trails in the southern area of the Monument. Others wanted to keep development of visitor amenities and other structures to a minimum and monitoring visitor use to prevent light and noise pollution in preserving the clarity of the night sky and the tranquility of the monument.

Transportation and Access: Comments varied from providing adequate access throughout the Monument, especially to those with handicaps, to leaving all roads in their semi-primitive state and closing many of the two track trails to discourage increased visitation to the fragile environment. Other comments asked for suitable roadways to provide suitable, accessible travel within the Craters boundary, especially the corridor between Minidoka and Arco. Other views wanted all roads closed to protect the cultural, geological and other natural features and to help reduce the spread of noxious weeds. Many comments supported enforcing regulations regarding off-road vehicle use as stated in the Monument's proclamation and restricting all ORV travel to designated routes, as well as completing a comprehensive transportation plan for the Monument, including a GIS map and database of all authorized and unauthorized roads in the Monument.

Visitor Use and Public Safety: Comments ranged from those who wanted hunting and sportsmen's access to be allowed as traditional uses of the land to those who consider hunting and ORV use to be incompatible uses for wilderness areas such as the Monument. Others wanted planners to build additional, longer trails for mountain bikes as well as designating certain trails as non-motorized to allow hikers, horseback riders, and others to experience the Monument without motorized transportation conflicts. Comments asked for the prohibition of open fires within the Monument. Other comments asked that guiding and outfitting activities be conducted in such a way to retain the primitive nature, wilderness qualities and resources values of the monument.

Authorized Uses: Comments received were polarized on the issue of grazing. Some wanted grazing to continue while others see grazing as an incompatible use on national monuments. Others wanted to prohibit any new range improvements such as pipelines, troughs or fences. Some suggested having livestock permittees work with the agencies to develop management actions that would protect and achieve sustainable, healthy multiple-use rangelands, while eliminating grazing from the more significant kipukas and other geologic features. Several respondents commented that grazing is recognized by the Proclamation as a valid use on the Monument but asked that this use be given a lower priority than restoration and preservation of the resources.

Natural and Cultural Resources: The majority of the comments asked that the natural and cultural resources be protected using current regulations and practices and that all currently permitted multiple use activities must be consistent with protecting the Monument's natural and cultural resources. Others asked for the protection of prehistoric artifacts and the prohibition of any harmful or extractive activities that could harm volcanic formations, wildlife or wilderness. Visitors should be encouraged to go to less critical sites and avoid those that could be easily damaged; kipukas should be left undisturbed and ungrazed. Comments also called for the protection of existing native vegetation and the removal of non-native vegetation with replacement with native species to restore the sage steppe environments.

Issues and Anticipated Decisions to Be Made

Based on public comments received and summarized previously, the planning team identified the following broad topics and anticipated decisions:

- **Development:** What kinds of Monument facilities and service will be provided apart from the existing Monument facilities? Are new public facilities needs in the Monument in the next 20 years? Will new visitor facilities be needed outside the Monument? What opportunities do surrounding “gateway” communities want for providing services and facilities to visitors? Do any facilities need to be removed?
- **Transportation and Access:** What type of road system will be needed for travel to and access within the Monument? Will any roads in the Monument be closed? Will there be any additional restrictions on travel to protect Monument resources? Will any roads be upgraded? Will some roads receive better maintenance? Will access to portions of the Monument be improved? What role will the counties play?
- **Visitor Use and Public Safety:** What will be the extent and location of public uses within the Monument? What kinds of experiences do visitors want? How will recreational uses of the land be affected? Will visitation increase and how will it be managed? How will the public know where they can hunt? Are there new safety concerns associated with visitor use? Which public services will be provided by the federal government and which by local governments or private entities? To what level will the federal government assist local governments with needs for emergency services in the Monument? Will the Monument boundary and NPS/BLM lands in the Monument be identified with signs? What opportunities will there be for enhancing understanding and appreciation of the Great Rift area? What kind of interpretive and education services do visitors want? Which visitor activities are suitable where can they occur?
- **Authorized Uses:** How will the different uses in the Monument be managed? How will grazing be managed in the Monument? Are improvements needed to enhance rangeland health? What is the need for local material for road maintenance? What opportunities will there be for outfitter and guide operations and concession activities in the Monument?
- **Natural and Cultural Resources:** How will the natural and cultural resources be protected? How will the more fragile and significant geological features be protected from visitor use impacts? What protection will be offered for cultural resource sites? How can the scientific value of both the plant and animal communities and geological features best be protected and understood? How will the introduction and spread of noxious weeds be controlled? Will there be new guidelines for weed, grasshopper, and predator control programs? How will fire management be addressed in the Monument? How will restoration and rehabilitation efforts be addressed on Monument lands? How will management actions protect resources like night sky and natural quiet, the integrity of the viewsapes, and pristine air quality?

Issues Raised That Are Not Appropriately Addressed in the Planning Process

A number of comments raised issues concerning actions that cannot be taken because they are beyond the scope of the plan or inconsistent with policy or because they would be more appropriately addressed by an implementation plan.

Many comments were found to be outside the scope or inconsistent with laws, regulations or policy. One comment suggested a new road across a Wilderness Study Area near Bear Park which would be inconsistent with BLM wilderness study area policy. Another comment asked for road improvements in the vicinity of Big Southern Butte. Big Southern Butte is outside of the planning area. Another comment suggested that the Monument be scaled back to include only outstanding features. Reducing the size of the Monument is outside of the authority of the Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service. Several commenters called for the elimination of grazing on the expanded Monument lands. The Proclamation that expanded the monument mandated continued livestock grazing. BLM authority is limited to administering grazing permits under existing laws, regulations and policies.

Comments that are more appropriately addressed by implementation plans were often site-specific. One comment called for signed turnouts on Highway 93 with trails to access Goodale's Cutoff. While this comment is too site specific to be addressed by the Plan, the Plan will more generally address signing, vehicle access and interpretation as well as the management of Goodale's Cutoff. Another comment called for offices in Arco or Minidoka to fill the need for additional public services. While BLM and NPS planning authority is limited to the lands within the Monument, the Plan will address need for facilities as well as opportunities to work with local communities and governments to provide visitor services and administrative facilities.

Some comments provided very specific ideas as to how areas should be managed. One comment suggested Moss Cave be monitored and visitor use remain light. Another suggested overnight use at Old Juniper Kipuka should be allowed only with a backcountry permit and that group size should be restricted to ten. While the Plan will address visitor use, comments like those presented above are best addressed in implementation plans.

Valid Existing Management to Be Carried Forward

Monument lands will continue to be managed under the FLPMA, NPS Organic Act, NHPA, the National Register for Historic Places, other laws pertaining to Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs), Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), Research Natural Areas (RNAs), and other valid existing rights. Mineral materials may be removed from existing barrow sites.

The Monument Proclamation provides for continued livestock grazing on that portion of the Monument administered by BLM. Livestock will be managed in accordance with the Taylor Grazing Act and Idaho's Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management. Rangeland health assessments presented in the Plan will guide issuance of grazing decisions in accordance with applicable BLM regulations and policy.

SPECIAL DESIGNATION NOMINATIONS

One Area of Critical Environmental Concern is proposed in north Laidlaw Park for its undisturbed native plant communities. Some comments asked that an inventory be done for additional potential Wilderness Study Areas or additions to existing WSAs. The Idaho Conservation Data Center nominated two areas for National Natural Landmark status. One existing National Natural Landmark, the Great Rift National Natural Landmark, was designated by the Secretary of the Interior in 1968 for its geological significance and enlarged in 1980 in recognition of its biological significance. There were no requests for Wild and Scenic Rivers designation or new Research Natural Areas.

DRAFT PLANNING CRITERIA

Draft planning criteria have been developed and are available for public review on the BLM website. Newsletter #2 for the Monument Management Plan mailed out in August invites public review and comment on the draft criteria on or before September 23, 2002. The newsletter refers readers to the website or to request copy of the planning criteria by contacting the Craters of the Moon Monument Planning Team at the Shoshone Field Office.

DATA SUMMARY/DATA GAPS

The USRD/GIS Team is on schedule to provide the spatial data information by the October 1 deadline. The Transportation Plan is still needed.

SUMMARY OF FUTURE STEPS

In the next few months the planning team will develop a range of alternative strategies for managing use of the Monument while maintaining or restoring resources. Public input will be sought through public workshops and meetings. Monument managers will review public comments on the planning criteria and incorporate comments as appropriate. In the spring of 2003 the Draft Plan/EIS will be published for public review and comment. Based on public comments, appropriate revisions to the draft will be made and a Final Monument Management Plan/EIS will be developed and published in the spring of 2004. The final step is approval and implementation of the Monument Management Plan beginning in the spring of 2005.

Information about the Craters of the Moon planning process may be obtained at the following websites: www.nps.gov/crmo and www.id.blm.gov/planning/index.htm. Comments may be submitted by email to: ID_Craters_Plan@blm.gov. Other contact information: Craters of the Moon National Monument Planning Team, Bureau of Land Management, Shoshone Field Office, P.O. Box 2-B, 400 West F Street, Shoshone, ID 83352-1522. Telephone contact numbers are for the National Park Service 208-527-3257, ext. 106, and for the Bureau of Land Management 208-732-7200.